

St. John's International School - Dual Language Program

What is a Dual Language Program?

A Dual Language Program is one in which two languages are used for instruction: English and, in our case, French. In our program, often referred to as a 50/50 Two-Way Immersion model, 50% of instruction will be provided by a French mother tongue teacher and 50% will be provided by an English mother tongue teacher, working together as a team. Ideally, Dual Language Program classes will include equal numbers of English mother tongue and French mother tongue students. The students will be integrated during most of the day, allowing them to learn from each other as proficient peer models. This model allows for *additive bilingualism* for all students, meaning that academic progress will be maintained in the first language while the student obtains proficiency in a second language. Our program will allow us to continue to fulfill our mission to provide an excellent English education, maintain our strong social and academic objectives, while delivering the added benefit of proficiency in French.

What are the advantages of placing my child in a Dual Language Program?

Many research studies have proven the Dual Language model provides the best results for all students amongst the bilingual education models. Some of the most compelling results include:

- Students educated in Dual Language Programs throughout the elementary years have proven, time and time again, to perform at or well above grade level in both languages when compared with their monolingual peers.
- Students show increased metalinguistic and cognitive flexibility as a result of developing their mother tongue while comparing it with

the features of another language. The environment requires students to pay greater attention to context, filtering out the relevant clues from which they can make connections, which develops acute observational skills.

- Studies show that once sufficient levels of bilingualism are achieved, content learned in one language transfers over to the other language.
- Students develop tolerance, respect, and flexibility toward students of other cultures and languages as well as positive attitudes toward themselves academically.
- Children immersed in a second language from preschool age are able to produce a native-like accent and intonation, which yields higher confidence in speaking the second language than for students that learn after the elementary years.
- Dual Language students are more likely to go to university and more likely to work internationally.

Can students with learning disabilities participate in a Dual Language Program?

Yes. As of now, researchers have not found a significant relationship between mild disabilities and degree of success in bilingualism. Students with mild language delays and learning disabilities have shown to perform as well as peers with similar disabilities in monolingual programs, and learning a second language simultaneously will give them additional benefits. The disability will not disappear, but will manifest itself equally in both languages. A learner's attitude and motivation towards the immersion language and program are better predictors of eventual transfer out of the program than language and learning ability. Strategies will be taught to help students work

with their stronger existing qualities, and these strategies are transferrable to the second language. As no evidence has been found to make a case for excluding students with mild learning differences, we encourage all parents to carefully consider their child's participation in the program. Clearly, more research is needed for students with moderate to severe disabilities such as sensory-motor or cognitive impairments. Each child needs to be considered holistically on a case-by-case basis, and our specialists will be available to help gather the information needed to make this placement decision.

What are the characteristics of students that succeed in Dual Language Programs?

Successful students will have a solid grasp of either French or English upon entering the program. Part of the success of the model is due to the continued cognitive development in the mother tongue. However, another part is due to the many opportunities to practice with native peer models. Personality qualities also determine success. Students that enjoy interacting with culturally and linguistically different people, taking risks, and facing challenges will succeed. Parents that embrace bilingualism and the Dual Language model will also influence their children positively. Another factor for success is length of time in the program. One to two years are needed to attain basic communication skills in a new language. An additional three to four years are needed to master the subtleties of academic language, interpret, and produce increasingly complex language. Students that exit the program earlier than four years may temporarily appear to be behind their monolingual peers since their literacy foundation has been built in two languages.

How can I help my child if I don't know the second language?

Your child will have two teachers working as a team, and you will be welcome to speak with the teacher of your preferred language. Parents are encouraged pair up with a family from the partner language that lives nearby, so that students may arrange play dates. The school will provide information on local activities in each language so that children can have more exposure in their second language.

How can a Dual Language Program enrich the Primary Years Programme?

The Primary Years Programme standards call for schools to place and importance on language learning, including mother tongue, host country language and other languages. While we have always offered French as a foreign language in the Elementary School, we would now like to take our language education to the next level, providing mother tongue support for our host community language across the curriculum. In researching the best instructional practices for Dual Language Programs, we have discovered that we have already implemented many of the recommendations due to our alignment with the PYP. For example, Dual Language research shows that students learn best in schools that use thematic units and cooperative grouping, both of which we already do. Within the Dual Language Program, cooperative groups will be composed of equal numbers of French and English mother tongue students, allowing students to support each other in achieving a common goal. We will continue to deliver the PYP without alterations to the content, but with the additional focus on language objectives to be met throughout the curriculum.

*Please refer to www.cal.org/twi/index.htm for more information on Dual Language Programs.